

CNS8440

U GE 17-03 00291 EG354

aae the

Neil-letter

NEIL ATTACKS DR MAHATHIR'S LETTER

From Wan A. Hujaimy

LONDON, March 17 (Bernama) -- Sunday Times Editor Andrew Neil responded to Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's letter stating the Malaysian government's wish to continue with its policy of excluding British contractors from Malaysian public contracts by saying that he will continue to print whatever stories he thinks fit, and dismissed Dr Mahathir's denial of the British firm Wimpey's bribes in Malaysia as a lie.

In a letter to the Financial Times today, Dr Mahathir said the "die is cast" over the trade ban, and that reports and debates over the Malaysian ban on contracts for the British firms exposed a sad degree of ignorance or carelessness on the part of the British press and British personalities.

Coming as it did at a time when discussions over the dam aid to Malaysia and The Sunday Times article accusing corruption in Malaysia appear to have fizzled out, the letter took Malaysia once again into the main news agenda. It became lead item in today's BBC television news as well as its influential early morning radio current affairs programme "Today".

Referring to the accusations of corruption in The Sunday Times in its original article which was said to have led to Malaysia's drastic actions, Dr Mahathir wrote in a response tinged with heavy irony: "Of course, the natives are corrupt. They must be, because they are not British and not white. To allege that the Malaysian Prime Minister is corrupt is second nature."

He then questioned the probity of the British for their willingness to deal with an allegedly "corrupt" people. -- more

WAH MGN

♥17/03/20-47MST

R GE 17-03 00139 E877

REPEAT aae the

Neil-letter 2 London

"Don't they have any scruples, or do they consider giving bribes is not corruption? Dr Mahathir asked.

He said that allegations of corruption against him had turned out to be "baseless", and even Andrew Neil said the report had been "misunderstood".

Wimpey (the construction company mentioned in the Sunday Times article) denied these allegations, Dr Mahathir wrote.

Replying to this letter on the "Today" programme, Andrew Neil said: "He's lying there."

He told the Today interviewer that he had documents to back up his story that Wimpey had offered bribes to top Malaysian politicians. Wimpey had not denied these allegations, he said, adding that this was another example of a Malaysian politician "lying" about what Wimpey said. -- more

WAH MGN

♥17/03/22-07MST

R GE 17-03 00220 E878  
REPEAT aae the  
Neil-letter 3 (last) London

Asked if he would be continuing with his exposes on Malaysia in the Sunday Times, he said that if he obtained more stories about Malaysia like the one he ran in his four and a half page special last week, he would.

Neil denied that he was pursuing vendetta against Malaysia, but added that he would not be intimidated by Dr Mahathir, whom he described as "a man who runs most of his own press".

"I don't think any government or any newspaper can stand for that", he added, referring to the pressure applied by Malaysia on British contractors as retaliation for what Dr Mahathir said were "threats and lies".

In the letter, the contents of which were used by the FT in their front page lead story today, Dr Mahathir also referred to reports of Andrew Neil's "affair" with Pamela Bordes, a former researcher who once worked at the House of Commons.

"Alleging, wrongly, that the Malaysian Prime Minister is corrupt may be part of British press freedom. But the Malaysian Prime Minister need not subscribe to that, even as Andrew Neil himself did not accept reports on his affair with Pamela Bordes", Dr Mahathir wrote. -- Bernama

WAH MGN

17/03/22-07MST

R GE 17-03 00217 E881  
REPEAT aae the  
Neil-letter 4 London (reopens)

Following is Dr Mahathir's letter:

MALAYSIA: NO CONTRACTS FOR BRITAIN IF THE CONSEQUENCE IS VILIFICATION  
From the prime minister of Malaysia

The reports and debates on the Malaysian ban on contracts for British firms expose a sad degree of ignorance or carelessness on the part of the British press and the British personalities.

In the first place everyone seems incapable of distinguishing between a loan and a grant. Persistently, the loan for the Pergau Dam is referred to as a grant. Had it been a grant, the amount which covered more than half the cost of the project would certainly have made it a wonderful buy for the Malaysians, contrary to what the press and some British officials insist it was.

A loan has to be repaid with interest, however small. The benefit for Malaysia would only be marginal. On the other hand, if it was not offered, the project could have gone to non-British companies. Japan offers soft loans on a yearly basis. Other countries also offer grants or loan when bidding for projects.

The Pergau loan serves to help pay a British company which presumably would make a profit. -- more

WAH MGN

17/03/21-58MST

CNS8455

U GE 17-03 00274 EG359

aae the

Neil-Letter 5 London

So the aid benefits a British company. Malaysia gets nothing other than a marginally lower price. How driving a hard bargain in order to save the Malaysian government's money is considered corruption is beyond us.

Malaysians are not concerned about British scruples over selling arms. Arms are arms and, whether they are gifts or subsidised or aided or sold at a massive profit, the purpose is the same.

If you have scruples don't sell arms at all. In no other business is there so much hypocrisy in the west. When arms are sold, long-term payments or offset programmes or special terms are invariably offered by everyone.

In any case it is clear that the loan is for the Pergau Dam. It has never been proven conclusively that it was for the arms purchase. The attempt to link it with the arms sale is political and intended to embarrass the British government. Malaysia is not concerned and did not react or comment.

Unhappy with the lack of results over the expose, the British press then shifted its focus to Malaysia. Of course the natives are corrupt. They must be, because they are not British and not white. To allege that the Malaysian prime minister accepted bribes is second nature. He should accept this allegation because, as a British newspaper later commented, all politicians in Asia are corrupt. The question is: why do the British insist on corrupting "corrupt" people. Don't they have any scruples, or do they consider giving bribes is not corruption? -- more

WAH MGN

17/03/21-33MST

CNS8456

U GE 17-03 00261 EG360

aae the

Neil-letter 6 London

The allegations against the Malaysian prime minister have turned out to be baseless. Wimpey denied (them). Even the editor of The Sunday Times said he was misunderstood.

There was no tender for an aluminium smelter. There was no smelter project. Only a feasibility study aided by the British government, which hoped to get the project for a British company, Wimpey. It was not feasible.

Alleging, wrongly, that the Malaysian prime minister is corrupt may be part of British press freedom. But the Malaysian prime minister need not subscribe to that, even as Andrew Neil himself did not accept reports on his affair with Pamela Bordes.

Press freedom is about telling the truth, not fabricating lies for whatever purpose. The contempt for the hurt inflicted on others seems to be condoned by the British government and people. No scruples about lying, seemingly plenty about selling arms? The standard answer to the Malaysians is that the British press is free. "Lies, damned lies" are free. Redress isn't. This is what western democracy and human rights are all about. If this is not moral decadence, what is?

Giving contracts to the British seems to expose Malaysia to vilification and libellous attacks. Why let British companies make money out of Malaysia if this is to be the consequence? If we are going to be vilified, at least we should not pay for it. Thus, the decision to stop giving contracts to British firms. -- more

WAH MGN

17/03/21-38MST

CNS8471

R GE 17-03 00176 E886

RRPRAT aae the

Neil-letter 7 (last) London

And Britian should be happy. No contracts means no soft loans, no grants and no corruption of the natives. Since Britian was, accordingly to British papers, responsible for Malaysia becoming one of the "economic tigers" of South East Asia, Malaysia would soon realise the folly of its ways. Then the free press can gloat when Idi Amin/Hitler/Mahathir comes crawling back with offers of contracts.

But instead we hear more threats and lies. Seems that paper gunboats still abound. What can Malaysia do? The free press is free for the British. It is not free for Malaysians. While British newspapers are freely available in Malaysia, Malaysian papers are not available to the British. And the British papers never publish Malaysian views. This is the practical result of western-style press freedom.

For Malaysia, the die is cast. No contracts in exchange for British press freedom to tell lies.

Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad

Kuala Lumpur

— Bernama

WAH MGN

♥17/03/22-08MST